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Jones and Temple Under Investigation

The West

COMMON threads running through the fabric of the Rev. Jim Jones' career had included faith healing, political magnetism, and a penchant for real estate acquisition.

The healing had been attested to by various members of Jones' flock, from his earliest, fundamentalist church founded in Indiana when he was 18, to his current, sprawling People's Temple which, like a university, maintained centers in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Fresno, Bakersfield, and Redwood Valley, near Ukiah in Mendocino county.

That he understood the political facts of life had been evident from his involvements as director of the mayor's commission on human rights in Indianapolis and foreman of the Mendocino county grand jury; he turned down a nomination by Mayor George Moscone to the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, and later accepted a Moscone offer of a position on the city's Housing Authority commission. (Jones was elected president of the commission earlier this year.)

Since 1965, when he had moved with about 100 of the faithful from Indianapolis to Redwood Valley, Jones had expanded his ministry and its holdings to the point that, with 9000 members claimed, the Peoples Temple (allegedly was worth at least $1.5 million in real estate holdings scattered throughout the state.

Many of the properties had been registered as "gifts" to the church from congregation members; but in the past year or so, investigations of claims from disaffiliated followers of the Rev. Jones had stirred up suspicion over the dealings of the Temple and its principals.

The waters in which the Peoples Temple brew had simmered began to heat up in earnest last month, with publication of an article on Jones and his followers in New West magazine.

The article alleged that members of the Temple beat worshippers whom performance of apparent [illegible] up to snuff; that Jones' reputed cancer-curing "miracles" were in reality staged bits of chicanery; that elderly, poor and disadvantaged Temple followers were bullied or otherwise coerced into turning their income and property over to the Temple.

The charges came mainly from disenchanted Temple followers, prompting the Temple to retort that "malcontented people... have attempted to blackmail the church, were guilty of grossly mistreating people in their charge, stole money from the church, and even sexually molested their children..."

Shortly after publication of the article, Jones left for the South American agricultural mission which he established in 1973 in Guyana, a small, former British colony bordering Venezuela. He was therefore unavailable for comment, as was the Temple's attorney, Charles Garry.

Discipline was said to include beating

Meanwhile, the Mendocino county social service department began investigation of alleged Temple misuse of tax revenue — money supposedly intended for care of the elderly and maintenance of juvenile wards; the office of San Francisco District Attorney Joseph Freitas was looking into the possibility that "there is any evidence that crimes have been committed (by Temple personnel) in the city and county of San Francisco," according to special prosecutions unit Chief Robert Graham; and the office of the secretary of state was investigating notarization of documents — including those authorizing taking minors to the Guyana mission, and turning over property to the Temple — by persons under Jones' guidance.

Last week, The Chronicle and other Bay Area news organizations reported further on allegations by some 35 former Temple members. Among the charges leveled were these:

• The near-obsessive collection of funds from Temple members had raised enough for church officers to have opened at least 15 bank accounts up and down the state. Followers were expected to

REVEREND JONES

contribute up to 40 per cent of their income, and engage in other means of garnering revenue, such as street-corner soliciting, mail contribution requests, and bake sales, and in addition were required to give time and energy to repair of church buildings, maintenance of the Temple's bus fleet, and other such chores.

• The real estate holdings, amassed in part from many followers' "donations" of their property, came to nearly $6 million, instead of the reported $1.5 million.

• Despite the Temple's claimed membership of 20,000 followers throughout the state, the real figure was reported to be more like 3500 — many of them elderly, black and poor. Among the specifications of Jones' ministry had been warnings that a race war was inevitable in America, and that the Temple, with its vision of a peacefully integrated society, would provide protection for its members.

• Five former members reported that since Jones' increasing interest in the Guyana mission, Temple leaders had been dispatched with large sums of cash — as much as $50,000 apiece — which they carried from the U.S. to banks in Guyana.

Discipline of Temple followers was said to include beatings of recalcitrants — those who disobeyed Jones' strictures against certain vices, such as smoking in communal dormitories, or failing to perform their assigned tasks satisfactorily. Others said Jones would make the wrongdoers box, in a ring, with bigger and stronger opponents, until the offender was sometimes knocked senseless.

In recent weeks, investigators from the district attorney's office reported that more than 400 church members apparently had left San Francisco on Temple buses, bound for Miami and flights that would take them to Guyana. The exodus was inferred from interviews by the district attorney's office with 50 to 60 former Temple members.

Jones, who had resigned from the Housing Authority position since leaving for Guyana, reportedly communicated with his U.S.-based followers via ham radio daily. Temple spokesman Mike Prokes said Jones would return stateside, although "nobody knows when," and that the Rev. would not answer directly the many charges leveled against himself and his minions because to do so "would play into the hands of [illegible]